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### Report to the People Vol. 1 No. 6

Florence P. Dwyer

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# REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

by CONGRESSWOMAN

FLORENCE P. DWYER



Volume I, Number 6.

March 21, 1957.

Recently, I received a most informative letter from a Union County housewife who urged me, as a member of Congress, to do everything possible to help "slenderize the national budget".

This was an eye-catching slogan, but the housewife's letter went a great deal further into the grassroots economic problems of the nation. She discussed with keen insight the tribulations of a home-maker who must meet the increasing cost of living and the tremendous tax load, and still attempt to keep her home's budget balanced.

She observed that there are many things her family would like - vacation trips, entertaining, home decorating, a new car and many other dreams a family shares. But, she said, they limit such luxuries to live within her husband's income.

"If the American family can make sacrifices in order to live within their means, why can't our government do the same?" she asked.

The concern expressed by this housewife is genuine. It is a concern which I believe most Americans today share. Certainly, the expanding tide of mail members of Congress are receiving protesting the increasing cost of government shows a new public awareness of the peril of inflation and the need for sound fiscal policies to counteract a runaway economy.

PROBLEMS OF OUR SENIOR CITIZENS

There are many times, as we in Congress earnestly strive to effect economies in government, when we find the need for economy in direct conflict with programs of unquestioned merit.

I had such an experience recently - an experience which resulted from another letter I received from an elderly woman in Union County.

The woman - one of our senior citizens in her 80's - had never married. She was the last of her family, and the savings she had accumulated during a lifetime of work were almost gone. She had retired prior to 1937, and thus did not qualify for Social Security benefits. And she dreaded the thought of seeking Old Age Assistance "because it will make me a charity case after a lifetime of independence."

"It seems sad to think that old ladies like myself once had and made comfortable homes and living for others and now have no home for themselves in their old age," she wrote.

I have always been deeply interested in the problems of our senior citizens, and this letter touched my heart. After reading it, and thinking of the woman's plight, I decided to make a study to determine what could be done on a Federal level to provide our elderly women who retired prior to enactment of

the Social Security law in 1937 with at least minimum retirement benefits.

Under the present law, the minimum Social Security retirement benefits amount to \$360 per year. But these women cannot be included under Social Security, because the law requires that a recipient must have paid at least six quarter-years of work contributions into the fund to receive benefits.

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seeking Old Age assistance "because it will make me a charity case after a lifetime of independence."

It seems sad to think that old ladies like myself once had and made comfortable homes and living for others and now have no home for themselves

The alternative would be legislation to provide these women with retirement benefits equal to the Social Security minimum.

The cost of such a program?

It is estimated that there are, today, 400,000 women over 85 in our population. Although no figures are available, it is doubtful that many of these women are covered by Social Security. The cost of giving minimum \$360 annual retirement benefits to this over-85 group would be approximately \$145 million per year plus administrative costs.

Such benefits would not be a continuing Federal obligation. In this age group, the amount paid out in benefits would diminish each year until there no longer would be a need for such a program, for in the future almost all of our senior citizens will be covered by Social Security.

However, despite the present need for some such program to help alleviate the hardships of our senior citizens not covered by Social Security, the cost of such a program makes the chances for enactment of such legislation doubtful at this time.

#### A SIDELIGHT ON ECONOMY

A few days ago, I voted against a resolution calling upon the President to point out to the Congress areas in which the budget can be cut. I did so because I believed this resolution was motivated by politics, and not by a sincere concern for economy.

On the serious question of economy in government, I believe actions speak louder than words. And the Democratic members who advanced this resolution were the same ones who only a few days earlier had solidly backed an irresponsible amendment to the Corn Bill which would have cost our taxpayers well over \$1 billion.

They also were the members who earlier this year signed a Democratic Program for the 85th Congress which would vastly expand spending programs at every Federal level.

I believe Congress should accept its budgetary responsibilities and make every effort to eliminate non-essential spending, rather than indulge in political buck-passing in so serious a matter.

#### A DISABLED VETERAN SPEAKS

As a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I recently made an inspection of Lyons Veterans Hospital in connection with hearings the committee is holding on the problems of the nation's VA hospitals.

This day-long inspection enabled me to gain a clearer insight into the problems of our VA hospitals, but the one incident I will never forget was a conversation I had with one of the patients - a multiple amputee who has been hospitalized since he was wounded in Korea.

The young patient was concerned about the tense international situation.

"I was happy to read that President Eisenhower signed the Middle East Resolution," he said, and he continued with deep feeling:

"Mrs. Dwyer, we've just got to stay strong. That's all I think about - that we've got to be able to keep the peace so there won't have to be other men like me ending up helpless on a hospital bed."